Interviewing elderly patients with cognitive impairments about the quality of their hospital care using Talking Mats™

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**Background**
Elderly patients with cognitive impairments risk being excluded or discriminated against if they are not asked their opinions about hospital quality and care. It is sometimes assumed that such people cannot be reliably interviewed, but this may be due to failure to use interview techniques to aid communication. We report our findings of an interview study of such people, using the communication aid “Talking Mats™”, which makes use of picture symbols to enable communication (Murphy 2007).

**Talking Mats™** provide a visual framework for people with communication difficulties, helping them understand and respond, encouraging involvement in conversations.

**Enabling Communication**

**Method**
Twenty-six patients who were confused at point of hospital admission were approached in hospital for interview about their experiences of being in hospital. Mini Mental State Examinations (MMSE) were conducted on all. Patients who were judged by the dementia-researcher to be cognitively able to answer reliably in a traditional interview did so. In the remainder, the interview was attempted using a Talking Mat™.

**Results**

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<th>Talking Mat Result</th>
<th>MMSE Score = 1/30</th>
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<tr>
<th>Talking Mat Result</th>
<th>MMSE Score = 7/30</th>
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N=8/26 (31%) interviewed reliably conventionally (mean MMSE 19, range 14-24)
N=7/26 (27%) not interviewed reliably conventionally, but reliably using Talking Mat (mean MMSE 9, range 1-18)
N=11/26 (42%) not interviewed reliably either conventionally or using Talking Mat (mean MMSE 12, range 0-24)

**Conclusion**
Talking Mats™ appeared to increase the proportion of people with cognitive impairment who could be asked to give reliable opinions about their quality of care, compared to conventional interviews alone. If replicated, Talking Mats™ provide a means to reduce exclusion and discrimination and hence improve the quality of care for elderly people with cognitive impairment.

**Reference**
Available at: http://www.vhscotland.org.uk/library/vol/jrf_nov07_talking_mats_findings.pdf

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